Unofficial Collaborators (IMs)

Unofficial collaborators (IMs) were the most important instrument of the Ministry for State Security (MfS) for gathering information primarily about citizens, society, its institutions and organizations in the GDR or abroad.

Under certain circumstances, IMs were expected to exert a controlling influence on individuals or events in the GDR.

In East German society, they were called **"spy," "informers,"** or **"scouts."**

With German reunification, the term **"unofficial collaborator of the Ministry for State Security"** became established for these clandestine informants.

They provided, among other things, information about public sentiment and opinions.

The SED leadership always wanted to be informed about the specific situation and circumstances in the GDR. The informants were tasked with investigating **"state-endangering"** activities, which the Ministry for State Security (MfS) termed **"political-ideological subversion"** or **"political underground activity."**

The scope of this was broad, ranging from private expressions of opinion to political activities.

Furthermore, they were also expected, albeit rarely, to directly influence social developments or individuals.

The informants were the most important instrument of repression in the GDR.

They were assigned to specific areas of focus from which real or perceived threats could emanate. These objects, territories, areas, or individuals were so numerous that the secret police's infiltration tended to take on the character of blanket surveillance.

The number of unofficial collaborators managed by the Ministry for State Security (MfS) in 1989 comprised approximately 189,000, including 173,000 IMs from counterintelligence units, 13,400 IMs in East Germany, and 1,550 IMs in West Germany managed by Main Directorate A, as well as various others such as cell informants.

This equates to roughly one IM for every 89 East German citizens.

Between 1950 and 1989, there were a total of approximately 620,000 IMs.

The development of the Stasi informant network is not solely characterized by a continuous increase, but also points to particular periods of growth during times of internal societal crises, such as the uprising of June 17, 1953, or on the eve of the Berlin Wall's construction.

The network was also expanded in the course of German-German détente.

By the mid-1970s, it comprised – by extrapolation – over 200,000 informants.

Given the growing opposition movements, it also reached a high level in the 1980s.

The extent of surveillance of society varied considerably from region to region.

In the state of Brandenburg, which encompasses the districts of Cottbus, Frankfurt (Oder), and Potsdam, it was more extensive than in Thuringia.

The former district of Cottbus had the highest density of Stasi informants.

The Ministry for State Security (MfS) formally operated according to territorial considerations and security zones, but set operational priorities in its secret police work.

With regard to the ministry as a whole, these priorities – at the district, regional, and main department levels – lay in the national economy, counterintelligence, and **"political underground activity,"** the **"disciplining"** of opposition circles, and the churches.

The motives for cooperating with the Stasi were predominantly ideological, less often material, and even more rarely was blackmail the reason.

Cooperation lasted an average of six to ten years or longer.

It is striking that a considerable number of these informants were social climbers.

The proportion of female informants was 17 percent in East Germany and 28 percent in West Germany. Over half of the informants were members of the SED (Socialist Unity Party).

Based on the party's 2.3 million members, 4 to 5 percent were unofficially active at the time of their cooperation, meaning one in twenty SED members.

The Stasi differentiated its informants into categories: unofficial collaborators for security, informants for securing and penetrating the area of responsibility, informants on special assignment, leading informants, and informants for securing secrecy and communications.

The most important category was informants with "enemy connections" or those tasked with **"processing"** individuals suspected of enemy activity.

During the 1980s, the number of informants in the unofficial collaborator category increased to approximately 3,900 by December 1988.

The proportion of West German citizens or foreigners among the Stasi's unofficial collaborators (IMs) was less than 2 percent.

In 1989, at least 3,000 West German citizens were unofficially working for the Stasi, in addition to several hundred foreigners.

Between 1949 and 1989, a total of at least 12,000 West German citizens and West Berliners were unofficial collaborators .

The Stasi's operational objectives were spread across the entire Federal Republic of Germany.

In addition, it had focal points in Europe, the Middle East, and Asia, with secondary focus on Africa and Latin America.

Its intelligence priorities were primarily scientific and technological espionage, followed by political espionage, and then, to a lesser extent, military espionage.

Consequently, the Federal Republic of Germany was primarily used as a resource for stabilizing the system.

Political espionage primarily served to assess the political threat level to the ruling system in East Germany.

This profile suggests that espionage was intended to preserve the status quo.

The secret police were far from infiltrating West Germany in terms of numbers. Rather, their unofficial collaborators were occupied with stabilizing the East German system.

Literature

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